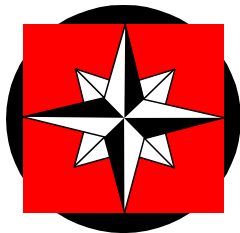


April 13, 2003

Issue 14, Volume 2



# NAVY MED NAVIGATOR

## Commissioned "Crankers"?

Officers merge with enlisted on mess decks

### In World News:

Four days after dropping bombs on a Baghdad home where Saddam Hussein was reportedly meeting with supporters and at least one of his sons, U.S. officials told NBC News on Friday that they still have no solid evidence that the vanished Iraqi leader is alive or dead. As special operations forces searched the site, U.S. intelligence officials were assessing the credibility of reports of "chatter" among Iraqi officials suggesting that Saddam was dead.

A senior U.S. official told NBC News that in the past few days they were hearing Iraqi officials talk about Saddam being dead. This has led a few intelligence analysts to think that it might be true. However, they caution, at the same time, they are also hearing other Iraqis discuss Saddam being alive. They were assessing whether the Iraqi officials are in a position to know the fate of the Iraqi leader.

### In Navy News:

NORFOLK, Va. (NNS) -- The amphibious dock landing ship USS Portland (LSD 37) returned April 11 to its home port, Naval Amphibious Base Little Creek, Va., after completing a three-month surge deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Portland departed Little Creek, Jan. 12, 2003, as part of the seven-ship Amphibious Task Force East. The task force, affectionately known as the "Magnificent Seven," was the largest amphibious surge force assembled in over a decade, carrying approximately 5,000 Sailors, 7,000 Marines and tons of heavy equipment and aircraft.

### In Sports:

NBA legend Michael Jordan had his number 23 jersey retired Friday night before a game against Miami. He also received a farewell speech by his long-time nemesis Pat Riley. Jordan led the Wizards to a victory over the Heat, 91-87, but all playoff hopes were dashed. He learned that Milwaukee and Orlando also won, eliminating the Wizards from the playoff with three games to go. The Heat hung Jordan's jersey from their rafters, and Riley said no Heat player will ever wear number 23 again. This is the first number Miami Heat has retired in its 15-year history.



Cmdr. Beth Gerring, NC, a PACU nurse, helps Hospital Corpsman Jonathan Nowaczyk wash dishes in the scullery Saturday during dinner.

*Story and photo by JOSN Erica Mater  
Comfort Public Affairs*

Over the past couple of weekends, you may have noticed something a little out of the ordinary during dinnertime on the mess decks. Something subtle enough to require a double take through the scullery window. However, it wasn't until after you handed in your tray and walked away did you turn to your shipmate and ask, "Was that an officer?"

Well, just for the record, what we have been seeing is officers working in the scullery as well as other areas of the mess decks. *Comfort* Chaplain Lt. Cmdr. Mark Koczak says there are several reasons why he takes time out of his day to help out in the scullery.

"I started working in the scullery shortly after we left Diego Garcia. I wanted to do something that I could complete in a short amount of time. Also, I

had worked on the mess decks on my other ships and wanted to do it here as well."

Koczak has planted a seed for his fellow officers.

"At first, a couple of officers came up to me and asked if they could help out on the mess decks, and it blossomed from there. It has been like a plant. I watered the plant and put it in the sun, and now it is turning into a little tree," said Koczak.

Koczak, who helps out in the scullery almost every day for lunch, says it gives him and the other officers a chance to understand how the mess decks work. He puts in that the work is hard and tiring but he likes doing it for the team. "I like the job, but I love the team," said Koczak.

Cmdr. Beth Gering, NC, a PACU nurse, has also started helping out on the mess decks. She says it is important to show commitment to the enlisted Sailors.

"I help out in the galley, because I think it is important to be a good role model and show commitment to the enlisted troops," said Gering.

Gering has helped out in the scullery, and said she and some of the other nurses want to give people a break from their job. That is why, at this point, the officers are focusing on the two weekend dinners. With the weekend dinner meals covered, the Sailors can enjoy MWR events.

**Continued on page 3**

# Comfort takes part in DOD press briefing



Story and photo by JOSN Erica Mater  
Comfort Public Affairs

The Defense Department held the third in a series of briefings on Enemy Prisoner of War issues Friday. The briefing originated from *Comfort's* conference room in administration and was broadcast live via satellite-teleconference to the DoD Briefing Studio in the Pentagon.

Briefers included Commanding Officer, Medical Treatment Facility *USNS Comfort*, Capt. Charles Blankenship, MC, Cmdr. Ralph Jones, MC, Cmdr. Tommy Stewart, NC, and Lt. Ramzy Azar, MSC.

Blankenship started the conference with an overview of *Comfort*, the medical facility, and the general protocols on treatment for Enemy Prisoners of War (EPW). He highlighted the fact *Comfort* is following all Geneva Convention rules and *Comfort* is providing the best care possible to all those brought aboard.

Jones then discussed surgery issues related to the EPWs including statistics and facts. Stewart continued the brief with

nursing issues in relation to Enemy Prisoners of War. Stewart concluded his portion of the brief by stating "these corpsmen and nurses are the next leaders in Navy medicine." Ramzy concluded the brief by talking about his position as translator on board *Comfort*.

The briefing was then opened to questions from press at the Pentagon as well as press members from Qatar and onboard *Comfort*. Questions ranged from how much are the operational costs per day to how the staff has reacted to treating more EPWs than coalition forces.

---

## Staff From Mercy Help Comfort

By JO1 (SW) Terrina Weatherspoon,  
Naval Medical Center San Diego

SAN DIEGO - There are currently only two hospital ships in the Navy - the *USNS Mercy* (T-AH 19) and the *USNS Comfort* (T-AH 20). Since January, the *Comfort* has been deployed in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

When the call came in that more staffing was needed Naval Medical Center San Diego (NMCSD), among others, answered the call.

Six groups of Sailors have been added to the crew of the *Comfort* since its departure from Baltimore, bringing the ship to its full operational status.

"National Naval Medical Center, Bethesda, did not have the staff to fully support the *Comfort*, particularly at the 1000 bed level," said Lt. Cmdr. Kurt Houser, human resource management department head at NMCSD. "Since her sister ship, *Mercy*, is staffed by NMCSD personnel, the Bureau of Medicine and Surgery directed our *Mercy* augmenting staff to assist *Comfort*."

This augmentation enabled personnel assigned to the *Mercy* to support its sister ship without pulling from other

potentially deploying platforms, or rendering the *Mercy* unable to sail with its minimal staffing.

Including this deployment, NMCSD has deployed over 460 Sailors to seven platforms in support of Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom.

"I am so proud of my shipmates," said Yeoman 2nd Class Shanette Parsons, who is assigned to the *Mercy* platform. "We know where the needs are and we are ready when the time comes to fill them. I may not have been in the group that has already deployed to the *Comfort*, but when I am called on, I'll be ready."

Parsons is not the only one who finds it hard to stand by and watch while people continue to deploy. Hospital Corpsman 2nd Class Amber Chalmers is about to give birth to her first baby but is also assigned to the *Mercy*. "It's hard for me to watch while everyone deploys and I am still here," said Chalmers. "I miss the ship and being underway."

Although Naval Medical Center staff continue to gear for deployment, there are no current plans to further support the *Comfort* with additional NMCSD staff, according to Houser.



## Chaplain's Corner:

# Heroes

By LCDR Mark Koczak  
Command Chaplain

**D**uring the first 1500 years of Christianity, the lives of the saints, people just like you and me, were a combination of comic books and heroic stories for most folks. They lived their lives and grew, and reached for something higher and better in their world.

Times changed. For the last two generations, at least, our heroes have become quite different. One of the greatest science fiction writers of the twentieth century, Robert Heinlein, stated that a culture whose heroes are entertainers and sports figures is doomed to fall. It is true that our culture puts such people in the limelight. Money and fame has become the ruler of who is a success.

For the last month, a different type of hero has become really apparent here on *Comfort*. Please take the time and look at what you are doing every day.

With our patient work throughout the ship and those of us who support the caregivers we are all working. A hero is made not in the big event contrary to what the media and others say. I have watched and talked to many of you during this conflict.

Your work is done with professionalism. But have you seen the look on the face of our Marine, Army, Air Force and Navy patients when you care for them? Or our other patients some very young. The simple care, that smile, that comforting touch, and so on. Many of you have noticed it in others and this is a very good thing. Yes, the care done in CASREC, the OR, the PACU and the ICU is wonderful and heroic. But so is the work on the wards and even taking a patient to the mess decks. Or how about the work of the hundreds of you who support the patient care? I have written about some of you. You all know who you are and what you do is important.

So, shipmates, who are the heroes?? For most of us, the folks on the front lines. That is true. However, you all are heroes too. A young person from a 5<sup>th</sup> grade class wrote the ship the other day; "you are my hero". I hope the people who write her back will see that in themselves. For me, as your chaplain, all of you are my heroes. In the work that you do each day and in those simple acts of care and compassion that you have for our patients and each other. My first two heroes in my life, a Hospital Corpsman and a Navy Nurse, were my parents.

## OFFICERS, from page 1

Like Koczak, Gering and her PACU nurses have used their time on the mess decks to build teamwork. She also said the mess decks are one of the most important areas of the ship.

"Nurses can fix people and help heal people, but EVERYONE needs to eat. The people on the mess decks are so important to this ship and it's mission," said Gering.

So what do the enlisted Sailors think of all this? Hospital Corpsman Michael Williams, has been working on the mess decks in the galley for a few weeks now. He says its weird to see the officers helping him out.

"I know they are trying to help out by serving the food and that is appreciated, but the hard part of the job is cleaning up and taking out the trash. That is where help is needed the



**Lt. j.g. Karen Ritchie, NC, Casualty Receiving staff nurse, takes a tray from a fellow shipmate while working in the scullery during dinner Saturday.**

most," said Williams.

Hospital Corpsman Nancy Luna has her own perspective.

"I think its cool. It shows that the officers want to do something good by helping out. When they are helping out, it puts us all on the same level, and I like that," said Luna.

Luna also likes the fact that it gives her a break, even if it is just for a little while.

Even though the officer effort is focused on the weekend evening meals, Koczak said he is continually getting more volunteers.

"A lot of the officers are eager to help out. We will soon start helping out during the week as well," said Koczak.

Even with all the eagerness, Gering still encourages more participation.

"Working on the mess decks helps the officers put things in perspective. When they actually do the work and realize it is not as easy as it seems, there is a lot more respect for the job and the people working there. I encourage more of the officers to help out when they can," said Gering.



# Comfort in the News



The pictures on this page are some of the pictures people around the world are seeing of *Comfort*. The different media organizations you have seen onboard have been hard at work putting *Comfort's* story out. Hats off to all *Comfort* staff members for providing the best medical care possible and helping the world see what Navy medicine is all about. Bravo Zulu .

